World Chronicle

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SOUTH SUMMIT IN HAVANA TACKLES THIRD WORLD ISSUES

This April, the Group of 77 held its first ever South Summit in Havana, Cuba. The historic event was the South's largest gathering of heads of state and government from the 133 developing countries members of the Group of 77. The Summit focussed on the broad themes of globalization, knowledge and technology, South-South Cooperation and North-South relations. The agenda of the Summit reflected the enormous global challenges facing developing countries today. In this edition of World Chronicle, Chief Arthur C. I. Mbanefo, Nigeria's Ambassador to the United Nations and Chairman of the Group of 77 discusses some of the important issues raised at the South Summit.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Established in June 1964 by 77 developing countries, the Group of 77 is the largest Third World coalition in the United Nations. Its aim is to provide the means for the developing world to promote its collective economic interests and enhance its joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues in the United Nations system. In addition, the Group promotes economic and technical cooperation among developing countries. Since its founding, the G-77 group has grown to 133 nations. Last April, the Group of 77 held a meeting in Havana, Cuba. 42 nations' leaders attended the five-day summit.

Our guest today is Chairman of the Group of 77. He is Ambassador Chief Arthur C.I. Mbanefo. Mr. Mbanefo is Nigeria's Ambassador to the United Nations. Joining me to talk with Ambassador Mbanefo are Thalif Deen from the Inter Press Service and Alex Essome from Africa News Magazine.

Ambassador Mbanefo, welcome to World Chronicle.

MBANEFO: Thank you very much.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, let's start out by trying to identify what are developing countries? What are the criteria? It's interesting to see that a highly sophisticated developed --. to me it seems developed -- country like Singapore is a member of the Group of 77. China, which could very well become a superpower and a rival to the United States in this century, is also considered to be a developing country. What are the criteria?

MBANEFO: Thank you very much, Mike. Let me start by saying that developing countries go in stages and then it's like you have a bar that you cross and when you do cross that bar you become developed. And quite a number of people have done that. Japan has gone across the bar, South Korea has crossed the bar, Mexico. A number of countries have in fact crossed the bar and joined OECD, which means that they are now recognized as developed countries. So when you say that some countries that are still members look to you as those who ought to rank as developed, we are in various stages of development. And there seems to have been a bar set somewhere by some people that when you do cross that you should no longer be developing. But coming back to the question, you are developing

when your GDP and per capita income are below certain levels, particularly your per capita income which relates to your population, and your gross domestic product. When all those are taken one into another one, you can say countries that earn about $100 a month or a day, to countries that earn $2,000, $3,000, and so on.

LITTLEJOHNS: So getting back to Singapore again, I mean, Singapore's per capita income is one of the highest in the world, I think.

MBANEFO: Well, yes, because its economy has exploded in the right direction and its population is very, very small. So that's where the assessment is. But also more than that, you find that visibly and physically the infrastructure, the mode of operation has improved and is comparable with the measure that we look up to, which is the standards in the West. Which for this purpose we refer to as the North in relation to us because the majority of the people we are talking about as developing countries happen to be in the Southern Hemisphere. Hence the expression North and South. And the majority of people who we reckon are developed as in the standards already established in the North as a measure, somehow are all in the Northern Hemisphere.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now, you in the G-77 do you sort of encourage some members who have attained these higher levels of development to opt out, so to speak, and go into the OECD?

MBANEFO: Of course not. We do not.

LITTLEJOHNS: You want them to remain. (Laughs)

MBANEFO: Of course we want them to remain with us because that interaction helps us. But it's inevitable because they're pulled on the other side by the industrialized world who feel that they will come. And within the United Nations organization, you know, we talk about things that are very, very dear to us. The scale of assessment, for example, whether it be for the general budget of the UN or whether it be for peacekeeping budgets, you know, people are looking at developed countries to contribute more and they would take that into account. That's one of the criterion for those kinds of assessment, particularly with regard to peacekeeping operations, is ability to pay. It's all right to assess but if you're not paying up then, you know ... So people want to say this country should be able to cross the bar and then be assessed more. But again that will take us to a host of issues that perhaps are not appropriate here now because those may be more relevant to a United Nations affair.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you're saying it's in the interests of some developing

countries to continue to be considered developing?

MBANEFO: Oh, yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Rather than to move on up into ... ?

MBANEFO: Oh, yes. Because the United Nations has a representation of 188 countries. Out of those 188 countries, 133 are members of the G-77. They reckon themselves as developing. And when you say developing it is not a flat sort of thing that you say, "Okay, you're stagnant." Within these 133 countries we do have various degrees of development; those that are very, very fairly highly developed, those that are coming on, and then down to those that are least developed. And that's an expression that has been coined and has been used widely when we talk.

DEEN: That's not categorized by the Group of 77, the least developed countries.? The UN categorizes them.

MBANEFO: Yes, the UN categorizes but they are also members of G-77.

DEEN: Right, yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: They're not categorized by the G-77 as least developed?

MBANEFO: No, no, no, we do not do anything like that. We do not do anything like that. We are all developing countries and we don't discriminate. (Laughter)

DEEN: Ambassador, you referred to the OECD, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, based in Paris.

MBANEFO: That's right.

DEEN: And they represent the industrial countries.

MBANEFO: They do.

DEEN: They are virtually the counterpart of the Group of 77. When you negotiate, you negotiate with members of the OECD. My question is that they have tremendous resources in terms of staff, in terms of research facilities, before they go to a negotiating table. But the Group of 77, do you have a Secretariat, do you have such research facilities and staff to sit with them and negotiate on a ... ?

MBANEFO: Our capacity compared with the people we negotiate with here is really a handicap. It is a handicap because the resources that we have are rather limited compared with the responsibilities we have to meet in areas of social and economic development, other development roles that a nation state is expected to play. But we have over time managed even with those constraints and an organization like the United Nations

Institute for Training and Research has been of tremendous assistance to us in trying to help us in developing our negotiating capacity in some of these issues. Now, we do have constraints that people ought to appreciate. Some of these constraints will include what you have said. We don't have ready made research and an information database where we can access all these on the issue. Climate change. We are talking of climate change now. We have experts there who will look at documents, who will negotiate on our behalf, and make sure that our interests are adequately protected. And what we do in circumstances like that to augment, of course, is to get one or two people within the group that do have resources because of their concern for the particular subject matter. They tend to lead and direct because they do have all the information that would normally be readily available to our counterparts.

DEEN: The Havana Summit wanted you to strengthen that capacity, if I remember right to set up a Coordination Commission or something like that.

MBANEFO: Indeed, indeed, indeed. That's one of the decisions in Havana ; this need to coordinate the efforts of the South in different forms and also to build up a strong enough Secretariat for the group, which is the institutional underpinning and strengthening of what we do have at the moment. We've been very lucky with UNDP support.

LITTLEJOHNS: UN Development Programme.

MBANEFO: Yes. UN Development Program support in helping us to make sure that we play the role expected of us in the United Nations. As you know, the task of the United Nations would be impossible if 133 of us had to negotiate on an individual capacity. (Laughter) So the wisdom of those in 1964 that tried to bring us together, you know, as a family is the force that we have become. The sheer numbers withstanding our position has been recognized within the UN organization as making positive contributions and then facilitating the processes within the UN system.

ESSOME: Mr. Ambassador, you just got back from Havana where you had this high level meeting. And the feeling among many Third World countries, particularly African countries, is that organizations like the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO are powerhouses to whom many measures are going through in order to force Third World countries, particularly African countries, to implement very harsh measures. At your meeting in Havana were you able to convince the IMF and other organizations of bringing about a resolution that would allow Third World countries to improve living?

MBANEFO: Well, thank you very much, Alex. The idea of Havana, Havana was the high ground. For 36 years of our existence we have never had the opportunity of having a collection of heads of states of the Group of 77 come outside of the United Nations system to look at the problems that we in the developing countries have. So Havana was a high ground you might say, a watershed, in bringing all these heads of states in. So we tried as much as possible to bring those important things to the fore. I'll not go into details, but those details have been provided in the Program of Action and in our declarations that we need to do something. So that's the second stage implementation of the decisions in Havana, the details of which have to be worked out for implementation. And so is the establishment of the Coordinating Commission which is going to now look into these issues in details. What has happened in the past which we must recognize, and that's partly due to the inadequacies of our negotiating abilities because we were all there with our eyes open during the Uruguay Rounds, you know, when the World Trade Organization was established, and lots of promises were made to us. We had the wherewithal. We should at that point have looked clearly and closely at those clauses that we are protesting now after we have signed and committed ourselves. We would have been able to look at them and so on and so forth. We have the opportunity of doing that now. And I think that Seattle also, in case of the World Trade Organization, gave us breathing space to look at this again. And so we're taking that into account. Regarding the Bretton Woods institutions, which are the World Bank, the IMF and so on, we do realize that the Group of 77 works in chapters and we do have what is called the Group of 24 based in Washington that coordinates our activities with these organizations. And we are working with them to try and find ways and means of improving relations. But don't forget that unlike the United Nations, these Bretton Woods institutions work on a bilateral basis. That's one to one. Here we are looking at collective things and are negotiating a collective position for our people. Whereas when we talk to the World Bank it is my country talking to the World Bank, it's your country talking to the World Bank and so on and so forth.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Ambassador Chief Arthur C.I. Mbanefo, Chairman of the Group of 77.

Ambassador, the UN is going to have a so-called Millennium Summit later this year in September and there's been some speculation that this may turn into another big protest thing like the one in Seattle, which you've mentioned, and the protests which greeted the

World Bank and the International Monetary Fund meetings in Washington more recently. What do you think is going to come out of the Millennium Summit? Is it going to be largely pinned on the problems of development? Is that the way you would like it to be or is it going to be dominated by more political issues?

MBANEFO: Well, Mike, you know that the idea of the Millennium Summit came up from the suggestion of the Secretary-General of the United Nations at the turn of the century and the beginning of a new millennium. The United Nations had done 55 years and perhaps it would be an opportunity for it to just look back at its operations and chart a new way forward in the 21st Century. So the arching theme for that summit is the role of the United Nations in the 21st Century and that I think is a pragmatic move. I think it's a sensible move that after such a given period of time and with the experiences that we have had. Just imagine when the United Nations stated in 1945 -- I don't know how many countries were signatories at that time -- the majority of us, including my...

LITTLEJOHNS: 51.

MBANEFO: 51. Of course. 51, 52. My own country had not even started self rule, you know, self-government not self-rule. Self-government which is a step towards independence. And we became independent in 1960. The majority of African countries of course became independent in 1960 and the vestige of that organization is still there in the United Nations. You know, the Decolonization Committee, which is still very much there. And only last year, don't forget in 1999, we added four additional entrants into the world organization. So what one is expecting is not that people should come there to demonstrate and bring to the fore some of their problems, national problems, pet problems, you know, and the rest but to help us chart a new course for the world, because the world, as they say, is in our own hands. And we do have experience now of trying to run a world organization where everybody's interest has been taken into account, however imperfectly done. But as they say, it's better to join than to fight. And so many things have happened in the world since 55 years of the existence of the United Nations. When the United Nations was formed, if you remember, it was inter-states affairs but aggression is a word that people seldom use now. We now hear of intra-state problems. No one is talking of an aggression from there. You now have freedom fighters, there's the government of the day and human rights issues and so on. There's been a lot of shifts in the road charted for the UN. But even having said that, I must give credit to those who were responsible for crafting the UN Charter because it

is so elastic and so malleable that whatever issues you want in human endeavour, you can find interpretation and the space for it within the Charter.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you don't agree with people who say that it's outdated and it needs to be changed?

MBANEFO: No, no, no, I don't agree. They are just modifications, obvious modifications. It is just that modifications are bound to come up. And I think that will be the intention of the Summit, that we want to look at ourselves. What have we done well so far? Where do we need to improve? You know, we're looking at structural change in terms of administration, which is what the Secretary-General has concerned himself over the years, you know, of looking at it together with the other UN agencies in trying to do a structural adjustment to improve the administration. But what about the underlying issues for which the United Nations operates? Political things, disarmament and so on and so forth, yes.

DEEN: Speaking of the Millennium Summit, what will be the input of the Group of 77? You know the Secretary-General is planning to have a declaration and a plan of action.

MBANEFO: That's right.

DEEN: Into the 21st Century.

MBANEFO: That's right.

DEEN: What would be the contribution of the G-77? And your Havana Declaration, will it be incorporated as part of the Millennium Summit Declaration?

MBANEFO: Well, if you remember, the Havana Summit did address the issue of the subject of the Millennium Summit which is the role of the United Nations in the 21st Century. And in that effort we looked at it as practitioners within the organization. And we know we're, as they say, in a marriage I suppose, as the man who wears the shoe knows where it pinches. (Laughter) So those of us who operate within the UN system really are beginning to observe where the UN as an organization has difficulties. And no doubt some of the concerns expressed in Havana when this subject was treated, it was treated also in an interactive environment where the Foreign Ministers looked at this thing, and also various heads of states and governments also did look at that issue. So some of the ingredients that came out of that will obviously be pushed forward in the Millennium Assembly.

DEEN: Ambassador Mbanefo, AIDS is becoming a matter of national security among many countries today and at the UN also in the Security Council. You remember this

was last January. But this affects mostly African countries. How does the G-77 intend to really help African nations to improve that condition?

MBANEFO: Well, HIV/AIDS people have said that next to the bubonic plague at the turn of the last century in Europe, you know. Next to it is this HIV/AIDS. It is true that the concentration of African people -- it has been highlighted mainly in Africa -- but let me say that it's not only in Africa, it's right around the world. And to the extent that it's gone because a lot of people did not appreciate nor create the necessary awareness when this issue came out. Like many things human they come out and people hide them because they don't understand. And then the stigma comes out, particularly because it's sexually transmitted. People don't want to say that, "Oh, I'm a dirty old man," or "I'm a dirty young man," you know. So there's all that hidden. Now the fact that it has come out into the open ware is being created, some recommendation ... I happen to be Chairman of the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. One of the things that came out of the work we just did is that peacekeeping operations should make a provision for creating awareness to those soldiers who have been engaged. One, we must create awareness and that is education of the people. Two, you must have the wherewithal to try to cure. The drugs that we do have at the moment we understand are very, very expensive and very difficult to come by so we need assistance and so on and so forth. But I'm glad that people are openly discussing it. The last meeting that was held in South Africa last month also emphasized this. And you also know that it is not just the Security Council looking at it during the January session, the American presidency of the Security Council. ECOSOC has also been looking at it, which is the arm of the committee in the United Nations that looks at special issues, is also looking at it and they're concerned. The African countries I would not like to be isolated from this issue because quite a number of Asian countries also do have this. It's just the way this has been neglected. The wars and conflicts also do spread this infection because in a state of war and conflict all over the place, unsanitary living in camps, refugee camps all over the place, boys and girls and things like that, puberty and things like that, do find a common place. And these things get transmitted faster than those other countries that do not have war.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Mbanefo, we have less than a minute left. Can the G-77 do something to pacify situations that exist in Africa and elsewhere, speaking of wars? The latest is Ethiopia/Eritrea. Of course there's an internal thing in Sierra Leone, the Congo is both internal and external. Can the G-77 do anything about that?

MBANEFO: Well, the G-77 is doing something about this to the extent that we do have our members at the regional and sub-regional groupings take an active part in promoting peace in their sub-regions and then working together. The fact that most of the peace accords have been evolved by countries like the SADCC countries that evolved the Congo.

LITTLEJOHNS: South African countries.

MBANEFO: Southern African countries that evolved the peace. The Lusaka peace accord, the West African countries that evolved the Sierra Leone peace accord and the Lome peace and so on and so forth. I think all these type of groupings done by members is progressive. And let me ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, I'm sorry I have to interrupt you there, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Ambassador Chief Arthur C.I. Mbanefo, Chairman of the Group of 77. He was interviewed by Thalif Deen of *InterPress Service* and Alex Essome of *Africa News Magazine*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

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